

2001 HardRock Hundred  
Or; How I spent my summer vacation.  
By Steve Pattillo

The HardRock has become a annual summer ritual for me ever since 1992 when I paced Charlie Thorn and John Cappis in to the finish. As in past years I rode up to Silverton with Charlie, arriving late at night on Friday the 29th of June. Saturday morning arrived bright and sunny with around twenty eager folks ready to help mark the course and hopefully learn the route at the same time. In the early nineties there were few if any “helpers” with the marking. This year was one of the best attended with twenty-plus people showing up every morning for the first week. At the end of the first week John Cappis’ Father was involved in an automobile accident near Marshall Basin and this really shook everyone up, his Dad included. (He is recovering from his injuries in Telluride by now) After things settled down on this front we got on with the job at hand. It usually takes about eight days to mark the entire course. This is with the help of Rick Trujillo and The Cappis among others. This year it took a little longer. We finally finished marking on Wednesday before the run. At this point I felt ready for the run. At the all-hands briefing on Thursday I was really pumped and wanted to start the thing right then and there. I had to wait until Friday AM like everybody else and by then reality had set in and I was a bit less sure of my prospects. I had dropped in Ouray in 2000. From my finishing times in 1998 and 1999 I hoped for a time of 39-41 hours. Also, this year I intended to enjoy myself more and see some of the countryside and not spend all the time looking at my shoes. I planned to take a flexible approach and see what developed. RFM : Relentless Forward Motion was to be my mantra.

The race start went off like the well-oiled machine it has become. Thanks Dale. We, the herd, wandered up and out of Silverton. As usual the South Mineral Creek crossing was well attended and I tried to suck it up and jog for the folks. I knew they were going to be heading off to a leisurely breakfast soon and I envied them more than a little. I stopped after the crossing and re-tightened my shoes and at this point I lost contact with Ginny L. I ran with several people in the first two sections. I recall seeing Bob Ross dealing with the bottomless mud just below the KT aid station. I remember thinking that someone should dump a few bags of kitty litter on that and realized that this wasn’t a terribly Eco-sensitive thought so I kept it to myself. Folks seemed to be in good spirits, Jennifer Roach, Mike Dobies, and Richard Hypio were companions for this part. We moved quickly through KT and on to Grant/Swamp. I placed a rock at Joel’s plaque in Grant/Swamp and headed on down toward Chapman. To be PC I supposed that this should be instead referred to as “Chapperson Gulch”. I kept that one to myself too. I like to get through this part quickly as the bugs have been intense around the water in prior years. The bugs weren’t too bad. The cloud cover was welcome and the temperatures were mild and all in all conditions were rather comfortable.

The climb to Oscar’s Pass was really rotten as usual. I spent about ninety minutes climbing and was so spent when I reached the saddle into Bridal Veil that I slipped and slid nearly to the bottom of the snow field below the cornice at the top. My left hand got a real dunking in the snow/ice and continued to tingle for much of Friday. As we started into Wasatch Basin, Ginny LaForme was having trouble. It seemed that her stomach had

shut down. She thought her Gatorade was mixed too strong. She kept moving and lead me down into Telluride. Somewhere along the lower trail below the Nellie mine I annoyed a bee or the like and was sting on the back of my neck. I had brief thoughts about the possible effects of a sting there. Suppose it was some rare and of course deadly Africanized or Colorado-ized bee and being stung right above my medulla oblongata would render me paralyzed and unable to continue. The up side was that at least in Telluride I would be able to get a decent cup of coffee before I expired. Another plaque? As usual, nothing exciting ever happens to me and I pressed on down into town..

Both Ginny and I ate and left together. Our spirits were still high and we were making good progress. I was talking away and having a great time. On the lower part of the road to Liberty Bell Basin we met Matt Mahoney who had a terrible cough. It didn't seem to be bothering him. I am always amazed that folks can keep going when they are sick like Ginny and Matt did. I have been really lucky as I haven't gotten sick from dehydration or had edema in several years. I knew Ginny and Matt had been up for weeks preparing for Nolan's and were both in good shape. I assumed they both would pull out of it, rise above it, whatever. Ginny is the probably the toughest and nicest runner I know. A real friend. I didn't want to leave her. In the past few years we have been through a lot on this run. There is a lot of emotion tied up in the "sharing" of this experience. I have several really good friends that I only see at the HRH. Her husband Warren and daughter Celeste are great too! Anyway,... I arrived at Virginias about fifteen minutes before Ginny and after a chat with the station crew I slid, fell, climbed down the rope on the first pitch below the pass. I used to rope as I could vividly recall Steve Pero's slide and injuries from our last visit to this slope during trail marking. The lower pitches weren't too bad and I eventually arrived at the "football field" that was once the Virginias mine. I got loosened up and managed to jog , mostly, to Governor's Basin. From there it was a long jog into Ouray. I picked up two Al cans along the way. It was just getting onto dusk when I arrived in Box Canyon Park. I took me a few minutes and the help of aid station workers to get my headlamp wired for the night section. I seemed to have lost all my fine-motor skills. John Dewalt arrived amid much fanfare and proceeded to be the center of attention. I had been with John on lower Oscar's road in '99 and wasn't surprised to see him here at this time of day/night.

John , his pacer, and I left Ouray at close to the same time; around nine-o-clock . I met Ginny coming in as I as leaving. She didn't look happy. John Dewalt left me on the old Otto Mears' toll road as I paused to adjust my tutu for the long slog up Bear Creek Trail. I never saw him again.

I was moving well and having no real problem staying awake. The two cups of coffee at Ouray really did the trick. I was moving but was slowly falling behind schedule. Engineers came before I knew it and I passed a runner sitting beside the trail just below the aid station. He came in a short time later and was sick . I guessed he must be dehydrated. The aid folks bundled him up and I was out of there. On to Grouse. That grassy basin below the Engineer's Pass road goes on forever. Then one minute I am staring at my knuckles and the next this red blinking light is right in front of me. I was surprised as I had never seen the thing in prior years.

For me the road from Engineers to Grouse is a mixed blessing. While it is fairly flat in places I find some of it too steep to jog on with much confidence. I am afraid that gravity will get the better of me and send me hurtling off the edge; never to be found

again. Okay, maybe not actually hurtling and perhaps I would be found but I have to have something to think about up there in the middle of the night. Something was indeed on my mind. When I reached Animas Forks I took advantage of the much appreciated and tastefully appointed public facilities. When I left a short time later I felt much better as a result of having stopped. I arrived in Grouse around four AM. I was getting slower and slower. However, I still felt good. Jimmy Fisher and his lovely lady friend were already there. Jim was having pulmonary edema problems and had decided to pull the pin. instead of pushing over Handies' and into Sherman. This seemed like a wise choice to me. He was a bit gurgly and was still coughing some too. The packaged bars I had enjoyed so much in the previous two weeks were beginning to taste a bit like a seat on a cross-town bus by now. I had a great burrito and some hot cocoa at Grouse. I left about four thirty. Joe Prusaitis and his pacer , Paul?, proceeded me by a few minutes and it took me until American Basin to catch up with them for the final climb up Handies. I was climbing pretty well and I was enjoying their company too. Just before the saddle below the summit I told them that I would wait for them to Burro's Park. I wasn't all that sure I would stay in front of them as they could really go down hill much better than I could. I was determined to run the section from the summit to BP and recover on the road section into Sherman. Joe arrived at BP just as I was staggering around trying to not fall into the creek while at the same time trying to fill my filter bottle. I succeeded on both counts. They both stopped and were filling their hydration packs. I started ambling down the road fully expecting Joe and pacer to overhaul me in just minutes. There was a fair amount of traffic on the road. Most, even the ATV's, were polite and considerate of the dust they were making. It was boring but not unpleasant. As I passed the proposed cut-off route I felt a twinge of regret. I still had two miles to go and I was already tired of this road. I saw the signs outside Sherman advertising the A&A Ranch restaurant.. The phrases, "Hope springs eternal " and "Location, location, location" came to mind.

Sherman was great , as usual, The crew there was contemplating opening a chain of coffee and snack yurts . They got no argument from me. My only suggestion was that unless they planed to cater solely to ultra runners they had better change from instant coffee to perked.

I saw Joe and pacer enter Sherman just as I left and tested my balance and luck on the log across Cottonwood Creek. Always a little nervous there. There are eighteen switchbacks from the trail register to the shack on Cataract creek. Some are short. Some are really long. The stream crossing at the trail above the falls looked slick and nasty so I wandered up stream to just above a confluence and crossed using the island without taking a dunking. In '99 it had taken me two wild tries before I finally scrambled across; all wet and blisters stinging. I met Gordon Hardman on the cross-country section just below the Continental Divide. He wasn't having a good day. He had decided that it was better to retire at Sherman than be stuck at Pole Creek. I had to agree with him. Gordon is one runner I never expect to see long after the start. I was bummed as I'm sure he was too.

At Pole Creek I had a nice conversation with Gail V about her exciting evac out of Pole last year. She told me that she was wearing a knee brace this year. I look forward to seeing her there every year. They are nice folks who really have an adventure just getting to the aid station each year. The trail was good and I made good time to Maggies from there. I passed Liz and Rick Hodges along the way. They told me that they thought

they may have misinformed Rick's pace as to when they would arrive at Maggie's and were concerned that she had been hanging out there all day. They are really nice folks and I wished them well and pressed on as I was still climbing pretty well and wanted to make time while I was still fresh. Storms had been on the Southern ridges/passes all afternoon and it looked like every step was taking me closer to this rotten weather. It began raining and lightening in earnest just as I entered Maggie's. The crew there was great. The more it rained to more they worked to keep everybody out of the weather. There was one young fellow that was wearing sandals and no socks. He kept bust rigging tarps to keep the wind/rain, now a torrent, off us. His feet took on a color somewhere between blue and purple. Mauve I think. I spotted Pat/Pam DiVito waiting for Rick and Liz Hodges. I told her they were on their way. I was getting chilled when Joe P. and pacer arrived. They were champing at the bit to get out into the weather. The lightening and wind made me a bit more circumspect. They left and after watching them ascend the road safely and the weather move down gulch, I took off and was soon climbing above the road. The rain had stopped and the sun peeked out. Soon I was overheating and stopped to shed rain gear. I met up with Nigel and his pacer Robert on the upper ridge. I stopped and with their help, pried a piece of what I thought might be malachite from the soil. They commented that they had never seen someone stop to collect rocks in the last fifteen miles of a hundred. Heck, this is the best opportunity I have all year and I wasn't going to pass it up. I also gathered some jasper on the road below the Buffalo Boy tram house. I was getting these for Richard Hypio's son and daughter. They had such a good time panning for stones in Silverton I thought they might like some rocks from the course. I handed the rocks off to Ginny LaForme at Cunningham. I was disappointed to see her there as an observer. She is in such good shape but just seemed to have a dearth of good luck to go with it. I gave the rocks to her and the aid station crew. One of the Crew brought me a piece of what looked like lead crystals. That was great!

Up and out of Cunningham. It was just before eight. I thought I could still finish before midnight as I had been taking Succeed caps whenever I felt crampy and my legs felt fine. Last year at this point I could climb but was worthless on the down hills. I hoped for better this year. I was fine until I got into the upper meadow above the mine site. The wind had picked up and had a bite to it. I stopped and put on pants and jacket. By now it was darkish and I switched on my light. I knew from years of marking this section where I wanted to go. I just wanted to "see" the flags to comfort my tiny tortured mind. It took me roughly thirty minutes to do the last couple of hundred feet of vertical. By the time I reached the narrow isthmus between Dives and Little Giant I was hungry and thirsty. I sat down on a pointy rock, I moved and sat down again and ate a granola bar. I was concerned that since I perceived that I was moving so slowly, that someone was going to come hauling along this narrow bit of gravel and tripping over my feet plummet into the basin just in front of me. I shined my light on my feet and felt so much better being proactive, safety-wise that is. After a few minutes I got going. Making the transition from sitting to walking took a bit. As Charlie says, "beware of the chair" the path in my case. I now know why. I was stiff and unsteady on my feet for several minutes. Finally I headed down the old road and was pleased that I could just wander on down with no hint of the soreness I had in '99 at this point. I was fine until I got to the shelf-rock section that is the descent onto the new road down from Little Giant. I looked all over and fell all over too. I wasted a lot of time looking for the flags. Finally Nigel, I

think, and others arrived and after several more minutes we arrived at the new road. They promptly disappeared from sight while I goofed with my light. I was alone except for the faint glow of their lights in front of me on the lower switchbacks. That road is at least eight miles long. I took me forever to get to Arastra creek and the rail bed. When I finally arrived at the beaver ponds section I ducked around a tree and in so doing ran into a sneaky branch that not only knocked my hat/light off but also scratched my head. I was certain that I was laid open to the bone and was rather disappointed when there wasn't any trace of blood. That still didn't mean that Charlie was off the hook for this section. I was positive that he had purposely understated the distance of this section, I didn't have any reason why in mind. However, by this point I was regularly cursing him and his dog.

I eventually got to the Lackawanna and the trail sections after that. This too seemed to go on forever. Finally I could see the lights of Silverton ahead and stumbled down the ski-hill toward them. There was someone at the bottom of the hill who welcomed me. I turned my light off and walked across the bridges. As I neared Greene street I could see people in the street at 14th and Reese. In my peculiar state of mind, maybe I should audition for "Survivor". I just wanted to finish and avoid all the people. I slunk over onto the sidewalk and, hugging the shadows, I wandered into the street in front of the gymnasium. I strode up to the clock and announced that I was finishing. There was a bit of confusion and Dale emerged from the lights and congratulated me while at the same time chastising me for not letting folks know that I was coming in. I get even more peculiar in my behavior after one hundred miles and forty-three hours on my feet.

I could still walk and in fact was a bit hesitant to sit lest I not be able to get up again. My beautiful wife Peg was there to greet me with a hug. I was home. I was down. I would now start the process of re-compressing and getting back "into" life. It isn't a big deal but every year I do notice that there is a jolt when I re-enter reality after having been alone with my thoughts and other dear friends that are runners and in a like state for two days. It is good to have something I can focus on to the exclusion of all else, if even for only a short time every year. I was done.

I get so much from this run. All year I have a reservoir of good feelings to draw from when work or life in general gets me down. I look forward to seeing the same old faces and some new ones every year in July. As I told Dale as I finished, "This is a great run, you did a great job this year. The weather really sucked. How did you do that?"

Thanks Peggy, Charlie, Andi, John. Dale, and all the rest. See you next year.

Steve Pattillo